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OH WELL, AN OLD GUY LIKE ME CAN'T EXPECT MUCH ATTENTION ANY MORE.

BUT BELIEVE ME, TWENTY YEARS AGO I'D GIVE THAT BOOB A RUN, YESSIRREE!!

WELL, WELL, IF IT ISN'T PETEY DINK—HAVEN'T SEEN YOU IN TWENTY YEARS—YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED A BIT—!!

PETEEY DINK—MAYBE HE WOULD HAVE AND MAYBE HE WOULDN'T.

## The Hillman

By

E. PHILLIPS OPENHEIM

Author of "The Double Traitor," "The Master Mummer," etc.

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He summoned up courage to ask her the question which had been on his lips more than once.

"As you stay with us is so nearly over, won't you abandon your incorrigible?"

"In the absence of your brother," she answered, "I will risk it. My name is Louise Maurel."

"Louise Maurel, the actress?" he repeated wonderingly.

"I am she," Louise confessed, "Would your brother," she added, with a little reticence, "feel that he had given me a right's looking under false pretenses?"

John made no immediate reply. The world had turned conspiratorially with him, Louise Maurel, and a great friend of the prince of Seyre. He walked on mechanically until she turned and looked at him.

"Well?"

"I am sorry," he declared bluntly.

"Why?" she asked, a little startled at his candor.

"I am sorry, first of all, that you are a friend of the prince of Seyre."

"And again, why?"

"Because of his reputation in these parts."

"What does that mean?" she asked.

"I am not a scandal-monger," John replied dryly. "I speak only of what I know. His estates near here are systematically neglected. He is the worst landlord in the country, and the most unscrupulous. His tenants, both here and in Westmoreland, have to work themselves to death to provide him with the means of living a disreputable life."

"Are you not forgetting that the prince of Seyre is a friend of mine?" she asked stiffly.

"I forget nothing," he answered.

"You see, up here we have not learned the art of evading the truth."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"So much for the prince of Seyre, then. And now, why your dislike of my profession?"

"That is another matter," he confessed. "You came from a world of which I know nothing. All I can say is that I would rather think of you as something different."

She laughed at his somber face and patted his arm lightly.

"Big man of the hills," she said, "when you come down from your frozen heights to look for the flowers, I shall try to make you see things differently."

### CHAPTER V.

Once more that long, winding stretch of mountain road lay empty under the moonlight. Up the long slope, where three months before he had ridden to find himself confronted with the advance of his life, John Strangeway began to wonder in his mind.

The mare, scolding her stable, broke into a quick trot. They topped the long rise. Suddenly she felt a hand light on her reins. She looked quickly around, and then stood patiently awaiting her master's bidding.

It seemed to John as if he had passed from the partial abstraction of the last few hours into absolute and entire consciousness of the present. He could see the moonlight down by the side of the road, could hear the faint, plaintive voice of the wind, and the soft, pleasant words of greeting from the woman who had seemed from the first as if she were very far removed indeed from any of the small annoyances of their accident.

"He has broken down. Can you help?"

He set his teeth. The potency of the recollection was a torture to him. Word by word he lived again through that brief interview. He saw her descend from the car, felt the touch of her hand on his arm, saw the flash of her brown eyes as she drew close to him with that pleasant little air of familiarity, shared by no other woman he had ever known.

Then the little scene faded away, and he remembered the tedious present. He had spent two dull days at the house of a neighboring land owner, playing cricket in the daytime, dancing at night with women in whom he was unable to feel the slightest interest, always with that faraway feeling in his heart, struggling hour by hour with that curious restlessness which seemed to have taken a permanent place in his disposition. He was on his way home to Peak Hall. He knew exactly

the welcome which was awaiting him. He knew exactly the news he would receive. He raised his whip and cracked it viciously in the air.

Stephen was waiting for him, as he had expected, in the dining room. The older Strangeway was seated in his accustomed chair, smoking his pipe and reading the paper. The table was laid for a meal, which Jennings was preparing to serve.

"Back again, John?" his brother remarked, looking at him fixedly over his newspaper.

John picked up one or two letters, glanced them over, and hung them down upon the table. He had examined every envelope for the last few months with the same expectancy, and thrown each one down with the same thrush of disappointment.

"As you see."

"Had a good time?"

"Not very. Have they finished the barley fields, Stephen?"

"All in at eight o'clock."

There was a brief silence. Then Stephen knocked the ashes from his pipe and rose to his feet.

"John," he asked, "why did you pull up on the road there?"

There was no immediate answer. The slightest of frowns formed itself upon the younger man's face.

"How did you know that I pulled up?"

"I was sitting with the window open, listening for you. I came outside to see what had happened, and I saw your lights standing still."

"I had a fancy to stop for a moment," John said, "nothing more."

"You aren't letting your thoughts dwell upon that woman?"

"I have thought about her sometimes," John answered, almost defiantly. "What's the harm? I'm still here, am I not?"

Stephen crossed the room. From the drawer of the old mahogany sideboard

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An anger that was almost paralyzing, a sense of the utter impotence of words, drove John in silence from the room. He left the house by the back door, passed quickly through the orchard, where the tangled moonlight lay upon the ground in strange, fantastic shadows; across the narrow strip of field, a field now of golden stubble; up the hill which looked down upon the farm buildings and the churchyard.

He sat grimly down upon a great boulder, filled with a hateful sense of unrequited passion, and with a sheer thankfulness in his heart that he had escaped the miasma of evil thoughts which Stephen's words seemed to have created. The fancy seized him to face created, the half-veiled suggestions of his brother, so far as they concerned himself and his life during the last

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Stephen was right. This woman who had dropped from the clouds for those few brief hours had played strange havoc with John's thoughts and his whole outlook upon life. The coming of harvest, the care of his people, his sports, his cricket, the early days upon the grouse moors, had all suddenly lost their interest for him. Life had become a task. The echo of her half-mocking, half-challenging words was always in his ears.

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